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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANAMA 002085

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TAGS: PREL BA REGION OFFICIALS

SUBJECT: FOREIGN MINISTER TELLS AMBASSADOR THAT GCC PLUS TWO SHOULD NOT BE ENLARGED (FOR NOW)

Classified By: Ambassador William T. Monroe for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

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Summary

¶1. (C) Foreign Minister Shaikh Khalid and the Ambassador December 28 discussed next steps in the GCC Plus Two mechanism, Iraq, Omani Minister Bin Alawi's visit to Bahrain, Somalia, the status of U.S. Navy dependents, and Guantanamo, among other issues. Shaikh Khalid urged that the GCC Plus Two remain limited to the current participants during this stage of discussing policies and formulating a common vision.

It could be enlarged if desired later on. He said the planned late-December GCC foreign ministers meeting in Bahrain had been postponed at the request of Saudi FM Prince Saud. Bin Alawi had come to Bahrain to participate in the first meeting of the Bahrain-Oman joint committee, and the parties had discussed the future of Gulf Air, including Boeing's business proposal. He urged the U.S. Navy to allow its dependents to return to Bahrain and asked for an update on the status of the two remaining Bahraini detainees at Guantanamo. End Summary.

Keep GCC Plus Two As Is, For Now

¶2. (C) The Ambassador and Foreign Minister Shaikh Khalid bin Ahmed Al Khalifa met December 28 and discussed the GCC Plus Two mechanism, Iraq, Omani Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs Yousef Bin Alawi's December 27 visit to Bahrain, Somalia, the status of the return of U.S. Navy dependents, and Guantanamo, among other issues. Regarding the GCC Plus Two, the Ambassador indicated that the United States found that mechanism to be useful in developing a strong moderate Arab voice on the range of regional issues. Shaikh Khalid said that he had spoken recently with Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Shaikh Dr. Mohammed, who had told him that there was talk of inviting Palestinian President Abbas, Lebanese Prime Minister Siniora, and a senior Iraqi official to the next meeting. Shaikh Khalid thought it would be best to continue meeting as the GCC Plus Two and not open participation to other parties at this point, while the group was still discussing policies and formulating a common vision. "It is better to solidify our position first, then see where we are going," he said.

¶3. (C) Shaikh Khalid said the group should help Abbas and the Lebanese and Iraqi governments politically and financially, but involving them in the process was pre-mature. He also noted that including a president and prime minister could introduce some awkwardness into a

previously foreign minister-level meeting. Shaikh Khalid said that he and Kuwaiti FM Dr. Mohammed had agreed on these points. He also noted that Dr. Mohammed had told him that the next meeting might take place in Kuwait in mid-January. Shaikh Khalid informed the Ambassador that he would be in Asia and South Asia on official visits from December 31 to January 22, and he hoped the next GCC Plus Two meeting would take place after that time.

Iraqi Militias Need to be Disbanded

¶ 14. (C) The Ambassador asked about the GCC foreign ministers meeting, which was supposed to have taken place in Bahrain December 27 or 28. Shaikh Khalid said that it had been postponed until at least mid-January at Saudi Arabia's request. He noted that Qatari Foreign Minister Shaikh Hamad bin Jassim had been asked to take some GCC points to Washington, and asked if there had been any reaction to these points. On Iraq, he said the GCC was willing to help the Iraqi government but the militias need to be disbanded. The great majority of Iraqis are scared of the militias, which are linked to Al Qaida terrorists or Iran. "We need someone in charge in Iraq who can stand up to the militias and get the job done," he said.

Next Steps on Gulf Air

¶ 15. (C) In response to the Ambassador's question, Shaikh Khalid said that Omani Minister Bin Alawi had come to Bahrain to participate in the first meeting of the Bahrain-Oman joint

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committee. Bahraini and Omani officials had discussed next steps on Gulf Air, which is owned by the two governments. Shaikh Khalid said a new Swiss CEO would take up his duties soon and would focus on addressing the airline's problems. The Ambassador said that Boeing had presented a very good plan to upgrade and improve Gulf Air's fleet. Shaikh Khalid agreed that Boeing's proposal was a good one and said the airline and Bahrain and Oman's finance ministers would need to make decisions about the way ahead.

Qatar and the Islamic Courts Movement

¶ 16. (C) Shaikh Khalid stated that things were developing rapidly in Somalia. He said that Qatar had submitted a draft UN Security Council resolution calling for all foreign forces to leave Somali territory. He wondered why Qatar had done this and commented that he was surprised the Qataris were so close to the Islamic Courts movement. As he had mentioned in an earlier meeting, he said that Qatar had asked Bahrain to meet with representatives of the Islamic Courts, but Bahrain had refused.

Return of Navy Dependents, GTMO

¶ 17. (C) The Ambassador briefed Shaikh Khalid on Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Mullen's December 27 meeting with Crown Prince Shaikh Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa. Shaikh Khalid said that the Crown Prince was particularly interested in the U.S. Navy allowing dependents to return to Bahrain, emphasizing the positive role American family members traditionally played in the country. He said that the DOD Bahrain School also helps "forge friendships that last forever."

¶ 18. (C) Shaikh Khalid raised the two remaining Bahraini detainees at Guantanamo and asked that the USG review their

status. He said the local profile of the detainee issue would rise when parliament starts holding regular sessions in early January. The GOB would like to be able to respond to parliamentary requests for information.

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